

# *Taking the Old Road*

By Bill Sigmon, Jr.

IT MIGHT BE NOSTALGIA,  
OR MAYBE THE LOVE OF FRESH, BOILED PEANUTS,  
OR PERHAPS JUST THE FAMILIARITY OF TRAVELING DOWN THIS OLD ROAD,  
THIS BYWAY I'VE BEEN DOWN NOW FOR THE PAST 40 YEARS.



*Backroads beauty. A weathered tobacco barn stands in a quiet field.*

Highway 378 between Myrtle Beach and Columbia is a trip back in time, a panacea that somehow smoothes out headaches, worries, troubles. After all, this is the very same road beside which I once hitched rides, back and forth to school, when things were simpler and when that mode of moving from one place to another was less fraught with peril. Nowadays, my friends often wonder why I don't drive the I-20 route instead and I have tried it, but inevitably have finished my journey feeling less fulfilled, and not nearly as refreshed.

AND THE PEOPLE...

OUT HERE,

THEY ACTUALLY

WAVE TO ME...



This road less traveled is literally a journey through quieter, more peaceful vistas and villages. There are a lot of roads like this, in every region of this great country... one only needs the patient willingness to take the time. Rolling farm country passes by the window, green, robust, healthy, and full of sunshine and patriot dreams. In rural South Carolina, one can catch glimpses of weathered tobacco barns, mirror-quiet farm ponds, legions of tall corn stalks, spreading 200-year-old live oaks, and undulating blankets of soy beans laid out in unending rows. Roll down the window in the

springtime, and the air is heavy with the sweet fragrance of delicate yellow jessamine, and a little later on, mammoth magnolia and tiny honeysuckle.

And the people... out here, they actually wave to me... folks just don't seem to do that sort of thing on interstate highways. Out here, people throw up their hands in greeting, even though they don't know me, and maybe we won't ever have the good fortune to sit down and visit with each other for awhile, on their fine shady porches... although I often long for that friendly interruption.

Church steeples spring up out of tree clearings or just around the next bend, speaking silent testimonials of the faith and values of a people who live by the land, and who work these green fields, who pray, laugh, love and live as a family, and who still know what it means to be a good neighbor. On the roadside up ahead, a black man and a white man lean side by side over the bed of a rusting pickup, laughing and enjoying each other's company, quietly absorbing the beauty of a country midsummer's late afternoon, complete with whirring, buzzing and chirping of cicadas, crickets and tree frogs.

Off across a wide, gently rolling field, a man on a faded red tractor raises great clouds of dust, in his race with the sun, probably thinking of suppertime, peppery pork chops, fresh butter beans, home-grown tomato slices, sweet silver corn, and great big hot biscuits, oozing with butter, all washed down with Momma's special brewed-in-the-sun iced tea. This fine repast will be complimented later, in the cool of the evening. With fresh blueberries drizzled over homemade ice cream, savored on smooth old porch steps, while watching barefoot children chase lazy lightnin' bugs.

This is vintage America to me... people just seem to be nicer out here, and somehow I don't feel as anxious, as bothered with insignificance, or as lonely. Out here, there is a gentility, a naturalness, even a wispy remembrance of an earlier, kinder time, that transcends anything crafted by mortals, that reaches far into the depths of one's soul, and graciously



*Row upon row of soybeans greet passersby.*

imparts a glorious sense of well-being.

Worries seem to melt away in the evening mist of these verdant treetops and shadowy bottomlands and quiet black rivers, and for the moment at least, we are able to find the strength here to carry on, in our larger journey along life's sometimes rocky road. For myself, a pervading sense of peace and great comfort comes from forays into these special regions, along with the clear and encouraging realization that truly, here in this place, God is in his Heaven, and that all really is right with the world.